BD stays firm on not playing T20 World Cup in India

DHAKA: Bangladesh's cricket board said on Tuesday it had repeated its refusal to travel to India for next month's T20 World Cup during talks with the ICC governing body.

With ties tense between the two countries, Bangladesh wants the International Cricket Council to shift their World Cup games from India to co-hosts Sri Lanka, citing security concerns.

The World Cup begins on February 7 and Bangladesh are scheduled to play their four group matches in India.

The row erupted on January 3, when India forced Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman to quit the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Mustafizur, who has played in the IPL for other teams in previous editions, was snapped up at auction in December by Kolkata for more than $1 million.

His sacking sparked fury in Dhaka.

On Tuesday, during a video conference with the ICC, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said it had "reiterated its request for the ICC to consider relocating Bangladesh's matches outside India".

Political relations between India and Bangladesh soured after a mass uprising in Dhaka in 2024 toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, a close ally of New Delhi.

India's foreign ministry last month condemned what it called "unremitting hostility against minorities" in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's interim leader, Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, has accused India of exaggerating the scale of the violence.

"The BCB reaffirmed its position regarding the decision not to travel to India, citing security concerns," the BCB said in a statement.

"While the ICC highlighted that the tournament itinerary has already been announced and requested the BCB to reconsider its stance, the Board's position remains unchanged." The ICC have not commented.

The BCB said discussions with the ICC continue to "explore possible solutions", it added, but that it "remains committed to safeguarding the well-being of its players, officials and staff".

Bangladesh, led by Litton Das, are placed ninth in the ICC T20 rankings.

They have played all the nine editions of the tournament, but have never qualified for the semi-finals —AFP

Australian captain Healy to retire after India series

SYDNEY: Alyssa Healy, a mainstay of Australia's dominant women's cricket team for 15 years and latterly its captain, has announced that she will retire from the game after the upcoming multi-format series against India.

The 35-year-old wicketkeeper-batter was part of two one-day international World Cup triumphs and six successful T20 World Cup campaigns before taking over as skipper after the retirement of Meg Lanning in late 2023.

"It's with mixed emotions that the upcoming India series will be my last for Australia," she said in a statement on Tuesday.

"I'm still passionate about playing for Australia, but I've somewhat lost that competitive edge that's kept me driven since the start, so the time feels right to call it a day.

"I'll genuinely miss my teammates, singing the team song and walking out to open the batting for Australia."

Healy made her Australia debut in 2010 and scored 3,563 runs with seven centuries in One-day Internationals and 3,054 with a single hundred in Twenty20s for her country, as well as making 275 dismissals behind the stumps.

As a mark of her status in Australia, Healy was never defined by her relationship with her uncle, Australia wicket-keeping great Ian, nor her husband, Test paceman Mitchell Starc.

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese led the tributes after her announcement.

"Alyssa Healy is a true legend of Australian cricket. As a batter, keeper and captain she has been one of the brightest stars in a golden era," he said in a statement. "Yet Alyssa's impact and example off the field has been every bit as important. She has helped drive and grow women's cricket and inspired a new generation along the way."

Healy had already announced her retirement from T20 Internationals and will play her last matches for Australia in three ODIs and a single Test against India in February and March.

Women's cricket has come on in leaps and bounds during Healy's career but, despite having missed only two for Australia since her debut in January 2011, her final match will be only her 11th Test.—Reuters

TOYOTA Gazoo Racing's South African driver Saood Variawa and French co-pilot Fran ois Cazalet compete during the ninth stage of the Dakar Rally, a 410km distance from Wadi ad-Dawasir to Bisha, on Tuesday.—AFP

Roma takes Dakar lead as Ford goes one-two

RIYADH: Spaniard Nani Roma led compatriot Carlos Sainz in a Ford one-two at the top of the Dakar Rally car standings on Tuesday after a tough ninth stage in the Saudi Arabian desert for some front-runners.

Dacia's previous leader and five times winner Nasser Al-Attiyah slipped to third but still only one minute 10 seconds behind Roma, with Toyota's South African Henk Lategan fourth — and with a further five minutes to make up.

"I had three punctures today, but I think everyone had problems," said Roma, who last led the Dakar 12 years ago when he won. "We are positive to be here."

Sainz said it had been hard to find the way at one point, with the cars taking a different route to the bikes and no longer having tracks to follow.

Lategan described it as a "little bit of a disaster of a day" after getting lost, suffering a puncture, broken windscreen and loss of power steering.

"I was driving with no power steering, extremely difficult in these cars because the wheels are so big so you have to have massive power to even turn the wheels," he said.

"And then we had some more punctures, got lost and we hit that bush in Seb [Loeb]'s dust that broke the windscreen. So we had to stop and kick the windscreen out because I couldn't see from inside the car, put some goggles on and carry on going."

The 410km stage from Wadi Ad Dawasir to the overnight bivouac, first half of a marathon stage, was won by 21-year-old Polish non-factory Toyota driver Eryk Goczal.

He finished seven minutes ahead of his uncle Michal, also with the Energylandia team, while father Marek was in 31st position.

Australian Toby Price, a double Dakar winner on motorcycles, was third on the stage for Toyota.

Sainz, 63, was handed a one minute 10 second penalty for speeding and finished the stage seventh but ahead of most of his rivals, including Roma in eighth.

The four times Dakar winner is now 57 seconds behind Roma, who also won on a motorcycle in 2004.

Sweden's Mattias Ekstrom, who had been second overall for Ford, lost a lot of time with a navigation error and dropped to fifth and 11 minutes and 19 seconds off the pace. Dacia's nine times world rally champion Loeb was sixth.

Spaniard Tosha Schareina won the stage in the motorcycle category for Honda, with KTM's Argentine rider Luciano Benavides losing the way and his overall lead to Australia's defending champion Daniel Sanders.

Sanders, also on a KTM, led Honda's American Ricky Brabec by six minutes and 24 seconds.

The race, which ends on Saturday on the Red Sea coast, is the first round of the World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) season.—Reuters

NONTHABURI: Players of Pakistan and Bhutan in action during their SAFF Women's Futsal Championship match on Tuesday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw with skipper Kayanat Bokhari opening the scoring for Pakistan in the 23rd minute before substitute Yeshey Bidha levelled for Bhutan three minutes later. Pakistan in their second match face Sri Lanka on Thursday. The Sri Lankans drew their opening game 2-2 against Nepal while the day's other clash saw India thrash the Maldives 11-1.—Courtesy SAFF

Venus' Australian Open preparations dented by Maria

HOBART: Venus Williams was dumped out of the Hobart International in straight sets by Tatjana Maria on Tuesday to dent her Australian Open preparations in a historic clash between two players with a combined age of 83.

It was the second consecutive tournament in which the 45-year-old Venus had crashed at the first hurdle after last week's Auckland Classic.

She survived 87 minutes in Hobart against German world number 42 Maria, who is 38, before slumping 6-4, 6-3, having gamely saved six of nine break points.

The first meeting between the pair set a new record for the highest combined age for a main draw match since the WTA Tour was founded in 1973.

Maria said her daughters Charlotte, 12, and Cecilia, four, were probably cheering for Venus, one of their favourite players.

"Everybody loves Venus. I love her too," said Maria. "For me, to play her was such an honour because I never played her before.

It was not easy with all the wind but it was amazing."

Maria last year became the oldest WTA Tour singles winner since Serena Williams in 2020 when she won at Queen's Club in London.

She moves on to a last-16 clash with Hungary's Anna Bondar.

American seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus will now head to Melbourne for the Australian Open, where she has been handed a wildcard five years after she last played there.

Venus, who has played only sporadically in recent years, will be the oldest woman ever at the opening Grand Slam of the year, which begins on Sunday.

Two-time Grand Slam winner Barbora Krejcikova also lost in the first round, needing treatment and strapping on her knee before tumbling out 6-4, 1-6, 7-6 (7/4) to American Peyton Stearns.

The Czech former world number two, now ranked 55, ended her season early last year because of a knee injury, but successfully got through three matches in the United Cup last week, picking up two wins.

Krejcikova, who won the French Open in 2021 and Wimbledon in 2024, missed last year's Australian Open with a back injury.

Stearns will meet Olga Danilovic next after the unseeded Serb beat American defending champion McCartney Kessler in three sets. —AFP

Djokovic faces 'New Two' roadblock at Australian Open

SYDNEY: Novak Djokovic returns to Melbourne Park looking to roll back the apparently inexorable tide of the "Sincaraz" era and produce an Australian Open triumph that would establish him as the most successful Grand Slam champion of all time.

The Serbian clinched his 24th major title at the US Open in late 2023, but Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz have since dominated the Grand Slams with a brand of fast-paced tennis that has blown their rivals off the court.

Djokovic, who will be 39 in May, is not impervious to the physical toll two decades on the tour has taken on his body, but only the most foolhardy observer has ever written off one of the mentally toughest players to play the game.

To move out of a tie with Margaret Court on 24 Grand Slam singles titles in the Australian's own back yard, though, he looks likely to need to beat one or both of the "New Two" at the business end of the tournament.

Last year, the last survivor of the "Big Three" beat Alcaraz in the quarter-finals only to retire from his semi-final against Alex Zverev with a hamstring tear.

He reached the semi-finals of all four majors in 2025, losing to Sinner in Paris and at Wimbledon, as well as Alcaraz in New York.

"I lost three out of four slams in semis against these guys, so they're just too good, playing on a really high level," he said after his loss at Flushing Meadows. "Best-of-five makes it very, very difficult for me to play them. Particularly if it's like the end stages of a Grand Slam."

Djokovic pulled out of the warm-up tournament in Adelaide in January but Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley moved quickly to douse any question over the 38-year-old turning up in Melbourne.

"He'll be here to play 100%," Tiley said at the weekend. "Just out of the abundance of caution, he just wanted to make sure he's 100% ready. He's won this event 10 times. He wants to go for that record, and this is the place that he has the best chance of doing it."

Indeed, Tiley said, it was highly unlikely to be Djokovic's last Australian Open either, tallying with the player's own ambition to defend his Olympic title in Los Angeles in 2028.

Djokovic's battered body might have other plans, though, and his chances of going deep will probably rely on him staying healthy into the second week at Melbourne Park.

He managed ATP titles in Geneva and Athens last year to take his tally to 101 but his best efforts at the longer Masters events were a Miami final and a semi in Shanghai.

It will be his 21st appearance in the main draw at the Australian Open, a run that started as a qualifier in 2005 when he was thumped by eventual champion Marat Safin.

Melbourne's large community of fans with Serbian heritage will ensure he has plenty of support at a tournament where he has otherwise been more admired than loved.

There is no doubting he will go down as one of the tournament's great champions, however, especially as his 10 triumphs came in the "Big Three" era when Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer were also at their peak.—Reuters

Arbeloa vows to 'fight for everything' as new Real manager

MADRID: Real Madrid's new manager Alvaro Arbeloa pledged to fight for everything as he stepped into the role vacated by Xabi Alonso and said he would stay in post as long as he was needed.

Real announced Alonso had left the club by mutual agreement on Monday, following a poor run of form and reports of unrest with some of his senior players.

The 42-year-old Arbeloa stepped up in his place from reserve team Real Madrid Castilla and inherits a side trailing Barcelona by four points in La Liga and reeling from a 3-2 defeat in Sunday's Spanish Super Cup final.

"Of course, I am aware of the responsibility and the task ahead of me, and I am very excited," Arbeloa told a press conference on Tuesday. "I've found a group of players who are really eager... They share my enthusiasm to fight for everything and to win."

Arbeloa, who has been part of Real Madrid's coaching structure since 2020, faces a swift baptism of fire with only one training session before Wednesday's Copa del Rey round of 16 clash against second-division Albacete.

The former right back, who played 238 matches for Real from 2009 to 2016 and won eight trophies, including two Champions League titles, was relaxed about how long he would serve as coach.

"I've been in this house for 20 years, and I'll stay as long as they want me to," he said.

Arbeloa's immediate goal is to bridge the gap to Barcelona in La Liga while ensuring progress in the Champions League and Copa del Rey.

"The important thing is that the players are happy, enjoy themselves on the pitch, and honour the badge. Wearing this badge is the best thing that can happen to you in life," he added.

NO MBAPPE

Striker Kylian Mbappe was absent as Arbeloa took charge of his first training session.

Mbappe made his comeback from a knee sprain as a late substitute in the Spanish Super Cup final defeat by Barcelona on Sunday, but is likely to keep working on his recovery until next Tuesday's Champions League match against his former side Monaco.

Former coach Alonso had admitted it was a calculated risk to involve Real's top goalscorer in the match against Barca in Saudi Arabia.

Arbeloa said he had a close relationship with Alonso, a former teammate for Madrid and the Spanish national team.

"Everyone here knows the bond that connects me to him, the friendship that connects me to him, how much I value him, how much I love him, and I know that's mutual, has been mutual and will continue to be mutual," said Arbeloa.

Alonso, replaced after less than eight months at the helm, said on social media he was leaving the club having done the best he could.

"Things didn't go as I would have liked," wrote the Basque coach on Instagram on Tuesday. "Coaching Real Madrid was an honour and a responsibility. I'm grateful to the club, the players and above all the fans for their confidence and support. I leave respectfully, with gratitude, and the pride of having done the best I could."—Agencies

REAL Madrid's new coach Alvaro Arbeloa (L) leads a training session at the Real Madrid Sports City on Tuesday.—AFP